

An interview with Ray H. Hahn (1)

RAY H. HAHN

An Interview Conducted by
Richard Pierard
June 24, 1981

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NARRATOR DATA SHEET

June 24, 1981

DATE

Name of narrator: Ray H. Hahn
 Address: 2527 Oak St., Terre Haute 47803 Phone: 234-0068
 Birthdate: January 28, 1910 Birthplace: Chicago, IL
 Length of residence in Terre Haute: Since 1939.
 Education: _____

Occupational history: In 1939, became associated with Otto Hornung's Shoe Store, Terre Haute, where he specialized in fitting of children's shoes. In 1952 the name of the store was changed to Hornung & Hahn; in 1956 the store moved to the Meadows Shopping Center and in 1967 the store became Hahn's Shoes.

Special interests, activities, etc. Civic work--pres. Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce, 1958-59; first pres. and organizer of the Terre Haute Little League; past pres. Terre Haute Exchange Club, etc. (See*Terre Haute and Her People of Progress, 1970, pp. 104-105.)

Major subject(s) of interview: _____

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Interviewing sessions:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Interviewer</u>
06/24/81		Hahn's residence	Richard Pierard

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RAY H. HAHN

Tape 1

June 24, 1981

Residence of Mr. Hahn--2527 Oak Street, Terre Haute, IN 47803

INTERVIEWER: Richard Pierard

TRANSCRIBER: Kathleen M. Skelly

For: Vigo County Oral History Program

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RP: So you actually, I understand, came down here to go to work as a shoe salesman, is that right?

HAHN: No, no. I came down here to . . . it was actually to put in . . . I leased the space from the Hornung people, and we put in our own business. It was a leased department, the children's shoe department.

RP: Oh, I see.

HAHN: I was primarily interested in juvenile shoes, and my sole interest in Chicago, where I had been before, was in juvenile shoes. And I specialized to a great degree. Well, I specialized entirely in juvenile footwear, and so this was a juvenile shoe department that I put in for the Hornung Shoe Store.

RP: I see. You were brought into Hornung's store to take care of juvenile shoes.

HAHN: That's right. They had adult shoes -- men's and women's shoes -- but no children's shoes. We put the department in and furnished the shoes and the fixtures. They furnished the space, and we rented the space and we operated together, although at that time there wasn't any association in business other than the fact that I rented the space from them.

RP: Well, that would explain why your family store is still so strong on juvenile shoes . . .

HAHN: That's right.

RP: . . . corrective shoes . . .

HAHN: That's right. It's carried through my hope.

RP: One of my kids bought a lot of shoes that way.

HAHN: I'm glad to hear that.

(both laugh)

RP: So, your training had been really in the shoe

RP: sales business then before you came here?

HAHN: Yes. That's right. That's right.

RP: Did they have some kind of special program that you took to learn it or was that just something you picked up on the job?

HAHN: No, I went . . . pretty much on-the-job training, I guess you'd call it. But I went to all the seminars that I could up in Chicago -- orthopedic shoe clinics and this sort of thing -- to develop the skill that I thought would put me in good stead down here. I worked with orthopedists and so forth up there in Chicago. And when we came down here, we started all over.

RP: And then Hornung of the Hornung shoe store business gradually faded out of the business, is that right?

HAHN: Yes. In fact, we've transposed our location. He now lives up in Chicago . . . that's the son, Ray Hornung, my former business associate, lives in Chicago, and I live down here.

RP: Is he still in the shoe business?

HAHN: No. He's no longer . . . he wasn't particularly interested in the shoe business and as he lost interest, he was willing to see to it . . . our parting was very amiable and very friendly. /We're/ still very good friends. But he was interested in other things other than the shoe business.

RP: You really bought it on the spot.

HAHN: That's right. That's right. He carried on his inventory as long as he could and finally dropped out of the business.

RP: You bought the business from the son?

HAHN: Yes. Yes, that's right.

RP: Where was your downtown business located?

HAHN: It was 21 South 7th Street. There's a tux shop where I had been; I think there's a printing shop in there right now. They change. There was a realtor in there for a while. And the tux shop is where the children's part of the shoe store was. There are two rooms there.

RP: So, you started out as a fairly small store?
Would you say it was a large shoe business?

HAHN: It was probably the second largest shoe business . . . shoe store /in Terre Haute/. And when we put in the children's store we were one of the competitive shoe operations in the community.

RP: Were you drafted or taken into the service some-time during the war? Or were you able to stay in business?

HAHN: Well, I was drafted and passed the physical, went to Indianapolis. And I hired somebody to carry on my part of the business in the store. Then they changed the age of limitations and I automatically was eliminated from the actual draft. Instead of being 1A, I was 1B or whatever the letter is (I can't tell you right now). And so . . . then I was interested in music and interested in other things, so I got in with the Civil Air Patrol. And I was teaching aircraft identification with the Civil Air Patrol, and I got to be band director /of the CAP/. But I was active in a very small way during the war in this area.

RP: I remember as a little boy learning all those aircraft identifications.

HAHN: Very interesting.

RP: They would teach us in the school class about the third grade or so.

HAHN: Well, we had special classes for high school youngsters, and some college students attended. We had our /CAP unit/ meetings at the old Paul Cox Field, which is now where South Vigo High School is on South 7th Street.

RP: Were they using it as some kind of an air station during the war?

HAHN: Oh, Civil Air Patrol was just . . . as it was in most places, privately-owned airplanes. We'd go out and do some flying. They were pretty independent, although we were part of the United States Air Force.

RP: Was an air base located at Hulman Field, is that right?

HAHN: Afterwards. See, Hulman Field wasn't in existence when we had the . . . the airport was down south at Paul Cox Field.

RP: Yeah.

HAHN: There wasn't any Hulman Field until later. Fact is our Civil Air Patrol band served as the official band for the ground-breaking ceremonies for the . . . when the Hulman Field opened out east where it is now.

RP: I was wondering if they had used the Civil Air Patrol during the war to take care of basic training for the regular air corps?

HAHN: No. They used it for training purposes, and they gave some flying lessons. We had a couple of young men that were flying in the United States Navy, and they had a training base down here that they'd give them some very fine basic lessons, flying lessons. Then from here they'd go elsewhere.

RP: Well then after the war, I assume then the business operation continued to grow in town that you were involved with?

HAHN: That's right. As our business progressed, we gradually . . . we opened up as a basement department in the store which was downstairs obviously. As the business grew, we needed more space so we moved into another room upstairs adjacent to the original store. And from there we developed then into a second store which opened up here at Meadows Center, eventually, after a number of years.

RP: So, the Meadows store then became a branch of the downtown operation?

HAHN: That's right. And as the downtown began to deteriorate, eventually other stores were moving out. We had a shopping center started out here at Meadows. We decided that we would open up a shop here and as our business grew here, it was gradually shrinking downtown. So, we closed the downtown and just operated as a single unit again out here.

RP: So, you were one of the original stores out here

RP: in 1956 when it opened?

HAHN: That's right. We were one of the original shops that opened. Was it '56 or '55? I'm not sure.

RP: Well, '56 is the year they give.

HAHN: O.K. Well, that's the year then.

RP: In fact, they're supposed to be celebrating their 25th anniversary this year.

HAHN: That's right.

RP: Well, when did you close the store downtown, then? Do you recall?

HAHN: I think we probably opened about 5 or 6 years before we closed it. We were open about 5 years. My son was in the Navy at that time, and he was supposed to take charge of this store. So I was running both stores temporarily until he got out of the Navy.

RP: I see.

Now, when did you get involved in the Chamber of Commerce? I think if I remember right you were an officer in the Chamber of Commerce.

HAHN: I was president of the Chamber of Commerce.

RP: That's right. You were president for a while.

HAHN: That's right.

Oh, I was active in a lot of civic things from time to time as we were living here. I tried to participate in the community as much as I could. And the Chamber was a very good interest for me, because our Chamber office was right downtown. And I finally got onto the board and eventually got to be president of the Chamber of Commerce. And through working on various committees, why it developed into a real good community interest.

RP: Did the Chamber of Commerce, to your knowledge, see any kind of or feel concerned about the declining downtown business area?

HAHN: In fact, during the time I was president of the Chamber, our primary project at that time was downtown rejuvenation. And we had a survey. The survey team came over from the University of Illinois.

RP: That's right, you were president in 19/58 and '59?

HAHN: That's right. And during that period we then put forth this effort to develop a downtown shopping center with perimeter parking around all of the shops to give us a downtown mall. We were hopeful. At that time we had all the stores down there, and we were hopeful to be able to develop a real good . . . well, redevelop our downtown to where it would be a modern and very viable interest for the whole community. Unfortunately, we had so many absentee ownerships. The lack of our political efforts at that time The political interest was minimal. It was a Chamber of Commerce project, and the political . . . people that were involved in politics at that time were not interested in development downtown. And we never did get the thing to jell. We had Mr. Herman Becker and . . . I've forgotten this man, the attorney's name . . . Dix, Floyd Dix, as co-chairmen of the downtown development committee at that time. And that's where the University of Illinois became involved. We had a mock-up of the entire downtown set up at the Deming Hotel at that time, and we were able to get a lot of interest. We were on television with it. But we never got anything . . . we weren't able to achieve what we had started out to do to get a downtown mall or downtown rejuvenation.

RP: Let me take one check and continue this.

HAHN: O.K.

RP: I'm a great believer in Murphy's law -- if anything can go wrong, it will.

HAHN: Oh, yes.

RP: (laughs)

HAHN: And it does! (laughs)

RP: Well, did you . . . in terms of absentee businesses, you're thinking of some large stores or things

RP: like that would have owners outside . . .

HAHN: No, absentee ownership of real estate.

RP: I see.

HAHN: People . . . there were a number of people that lived elsewhere. Only goodness knows where, possibly Florida, New York, you name it. But they were also property owners, real estate owners, and were interested primarily in receiving what they could out of their properties rather than . . .

RP: They were renting out these buildings and things like that?

HAHN: Right. And the rental of the buildings was a good income, and they were doing real well as long as business was holding up. But this was no longer in the future. I mean growth was no longer seemingly an interesting thing to them in the future.

RP: Well, did the Chamber of Commerce attempt to do something about getting a tax structure in downtown that would be more favorable to business. I gather from what I hear that they have had extraordinarily high property taxes on downtown property.

HAHN: This is one . . . along with the effort of changing the downtown appearance from an individual shop thing on a busy street to a mall, this was also part of the political association or the political problem. We were trying to reduce some taxes because the taxes were always unfair. The whole downtown area was /a/ very highly taxed real estate area.

RP: Did you find any sympathy from the City Council or the county agencies about getting those tax rates reduced or did they . . .

HAHN: Verbal sympathy but no action whatsoever.

RP: I was wondering if you recall how these people would have responded when you tried to confront them with the . . . just simply the cost benefit factor of these high taxes?

HAHN: Well, we received very little argument. A lot of agreement but no action. And from this Chamber of

HAHN: Commerce experience and . . . well, during this time that I was president of the Chamber, we also had the "Sin City" label pinned on us.

RP: Um hm.

HAHN: By Life magazine. And my attorney /Robert Ratcliffe/ and John Lamb, then the executive man of the Chamber, we visited the Life offices in New York City. We went there because we were thoroughly incensed about this thing and felt insulted and so forth that we should be singled out in this manner. And they showed great evidence of our earning this thing, and we were entitled to everything we received and more. They could have given us a worse picture than they did.

RP: You're talking about the big gambling expose . . .

HAHN: Yes. Yeah. Right.

RP: . . . that Life did about '57, '58, say.

HAHN: That's right.

And, of course, we went there. At that time, with much discussion then back and forth, we were, you know, defending the community. And they were trying to tell us that, you know, that you /they/ were right. /They/ said, "Well, now if you can do anything about this in the future, we'll be glad to do another article showing what you have done, and we will come back and do it with that in mind." And also with that in mind, we began then this thinking of what can we do and how shall we do it. And eventually, then, I became involved in politics immediately thereafter.

RP: Uh-huh.

Did you find that the Life reporters had done a pretty thorough job of their research in the community?

HAHN: We thought they did. We thought they did. We thought then they came in to do something else entirely and this thing was so evident and so flagrant that they couldn't possibly overlook it. And it proved to be a good story for them.

RP: You think they had already heard about Mayor

RP: Tucker's famous comment about that he believed very strongly in the spoils system that -- that statement he made when he ran for governor in 1956.

HAHN: I think perhaps they were. I think they were . . . I'm sure that they were aware of it, because they . . . well, they were very blunt about our political situation. And my personal feeling toward Ralph Tucker or his family . . . they were customers in our store for many years, and I got along with them very well as individuals. I think he was a very fine person, very nice person. To me. But I don't think that he did a good job of administering to the community. In this vein and with this thought in mind, that's the reason I got involved as I did to campaign against him.

RP: O.K. That's one of the things I wanted to raise. I wanted to explore your business a little bit more before I get to that. I've got the political thing all tucked away in my mind.

HAHN: (laughs)

RP: I think that's an important thing I wanted to get.

I was wondering how you found your customers for your business. Did you find that they came from all over the community or were you drawing from a very wide area or . . .

HAHN: We drew from a very wide area. We had people coming from Illinois. We had people coming as far as Indianapolis to our store. We keep fitting records at the store, and I could pull through those cards and still can. People that we pull from . . . gosh, some of them . . . we had a couple of them in Fort Wayne. I mean this is a good, long trip.

RP: So people were driving in?

HAHN: Oh, yes! And, of course, Illinois You know this whole area . . . whole Wabash Valley was good shopping.

RP: Now, this would have been beyond the days of the interurban.

HAHN: Yes, this was after the interurban. The interurban had just begun . . . well, it was . . .

RP: Yeah, they had gone out by the '30s.

HAHN: That's right. That's right. Well, they were still functioning when we came here in 1939, but during the war period all of this stopped.

RP: Did you find that you drew customers from just about all social levels of the city or . . .

HAHN: We had everybody from everywhere, and I can honestly tell you that we had people from all walks of life. You name it and we had them. We had people on welfare; we had people from the Country Club; we had a good many . . . well, we did a lot of orthopedic business and we had the reputation in juvenile shoes at that time that we had the store to shop in. And I'm sure that this made that much difference.

RP: Now, your decision to run against Mayor Tucker in 1959 obviously grew out of your Chamber of Commerce experience. But had you been active in the Republican politics here in the city . . .

HAHN: Never!

RP: . . . for . . .

HAHN: Not before or since.

RP: . . . a long time?

HAHN: I'm not a political person. I have never been involved in politics before or since. I did this because I thought that I might be able to contribute in some small way to a better Terre Haute. I'm interested in Terre Haute. And I thought perhaps if we could get involved in this thing and show other business people they could be involved in politics and not have it be a stigma, that we might encourage other good business people to do this sort of thing.

RP: Now what did you feel that business people could do in politics?

HAHN: Run it on a more business like basis. Maybe I'm naive -- and I've been accused of being naive -- but I think that, unfortunately, there are a great

HAHN: many people that like what we have. Or liked what we had at that time. It was an extremely close election with a hundred and some votes or whatever for the whole city, which was very close. So it wasn't entirely . . . fact is we had the highest percentage of votes cast at that election that's ever been cast before or since.

RP: The highest voter percentage here in the city?

HAHN: Right. In the city of Terre Haute.

RP: Hmm.

HAHN: Which should have been good against the machine. And it was good but not quite good enough. (chuckles)

RP: Did you have any feeling that there might have been some manipulation of the vote?

HAHN: No doubt about it. We were doing real well until they had the absentee ballots counted. And the absentee ballots counted us out.

RP: I see.

Did you have reports from your own precinct people or precinct workers that coercion was being used on voters or . . .

HAHN: No. Actually, I don't believe that there were too many violations in this area at all. I think perhaps they might have been guilty of buying with a pint of whiskey or something some votes here and there. But that wasn't the big problem. I don't think the people were forced into doing anything.

I think there's a matter of you have a political machine, and they work very efficiently.

RP: The old absentee ballot system they would make sure that all their people were voted that way.

HAHN: That's right. And they did. They could and they did.

RP: Well, do you recall then that you gave Ralph the best race he had?

HAHN: One of them. I know there was a man by the name

HAHN: of John Ennis that ran against him prior to my running.

RP: This is John Ennis that had the roofing company?

HAHN: That's right. And there was one man in between that didn't fare too well, and then I came along. But those two races were very close.

RP: Well, do you think that your involvement in that race had any kind of impact on the action of the city administration?

HAHN: I'd like to believe that it made some impact. And out of that grew an organization of women called HELP /Housewives' Effort For Local Progress/, and they performed a good service, I think, to the community.

RP: I think that HELP if I recall correctly arose right after the Saturday Evening Post article.

HAHN: That's right.

RP: Which, of course, you're quoted in.

HAHN: Yes.

RP: If you remember.

HAHN: I've forgotten what the quote was now, but . . .

RP: I have a copy of it.

HAHN: Good.

RP: "Indiana's delinquent city" as it was called. And this, of course, has . . . I think this is where you make the statement that would be in the Chamber of Commerce. You talked about the sewage and the traffic and the soot, but nobody seemed much interested. Now, was that before you had decided to run or after you had decided to run you found this sort of lack of interest?

HAHN: No. It was after I decided to run that I found . . . well, there was . . .

RP: Did you have any primary opposition for the . . .

HAHN: Yeah, I had a judge . . . or an attorney running

HAHN: against me in the primary.

RP: I see.

HAHN: And he had been in politics. In fact, I think he was the county prosecutor or . . . yeah, county prosecuting attorney at one time.

RP: So, you beat him out in the primary by raising these kinds of issues, is that right?

HAHN: Yes. Right.

I think that the fact that we approached it from a non-political point of view was helpful. I don't think that . . . I couldn't fight them with their strength obviously. You can't fight politics with politics unless you're a politician, and I wasn't. So, I had to go with what strength that I had, which was sincerity and honesty and sincereness. If you can develop on that kind of a basis and get enough people to respond to that -- react properly -- you get some votes I think.

RP: Well, now I gather that your approach was that we want to make this a better town and that this is my program for improving the community then?

HAHN: That's right. And see, up until that time . . . up until, well, all during this period, there'd been very little, if any, city planning. I think there was about 40 per cent of the city was unsewered within the city limits. The whole west end of . . . west of 3rd Street was a slum area which has since been redone. But there weren't any sewers. And they had no sewers to speak of . . . network of sewers for the whole city at all. It was just a hodgepodge, just like Topsy. /It was/ just kind of growing and nothing happening in any one direction. It was just a kind of . . . anything that happened just happened.

RP: Well, did you find that on the basis of running on this sort of a platform that you sparked the city council or the city administration to try to attend to some of these problems? Did you find that they were responding after the election to the kinds . . .

HAHN: Yeah.

RP: . . . of things you had raised in your campaign?

HAHN: I think that after the campaign this HELP group, these women, stirred up a lot of problems for them. And they reacted to their efforts because they were causing them trouble. My suggestions . . . it was a part of a political campaign and once the political campaign is over, then you go back to where you were before. But I think that these people that were active in this HELP group actually stimulated some activity that as a result of the campaigning that was done were causing them some difficulty, and they had to react to it.

RP: . . . I know you make the comment in the Saturday Evening Post article about the people themselves. Did you then perceive that there was a great deal of apathy within Terre Haute citizenry that you were trying to speak to?

HAHN: Yes. I did a lot of door-to-door campaigning. I went into all of the neighborhoods that I thought would be people that might not be voting for me just on the fact that I was running for mayor. And by visiting these people and talking to these people, they could care less whether things changed or whether they didn't change. They were interested in right now, from day-to-day living. And the fact that they were given a few crumbs occasionally (and I say this literally . . . I mean figuratively rather than literally). But that seems to be . . . there's a general apathetic approach to the . . . they didn't realize that we had any problems. They weren't having any more problems than they've ever had, and they weren't, you know, interested in stirring up anything new that might . . . And they were being told by the political workers that they were going to lose their welfare, they were going to lose their social security and everything else if Ray Hahn was elected as a Republican mayor. Vote Democrat. (laughs)

RP: They were using these sort of scare tactics . . .

HAHN: That's right.

RP: . . . innuendoes?

HAHN: That's exactly right. They didn't come out and say, "Now, this is what would happen." They'd say

HAHN: this could happen and that could happen. As far as these people were concerned, this is what was going to happen.

RP: Did you find that a lot of these people really were beneficiaries of some kind of patronage, oh, say through the township trustees or through city employment that they were afraid that they would lose or . . .

HAHN: Oh, there were maybe a few that might have . . . that I visited that might have been. But by and large I think that most of the people that I had been calling on were not employees or dependent on the city for a living. They were just the average citizen.

RP: Well, how did these people respond when questions were raised about, oh, say the quality of the sewers, the quality of the streets, the quality of the air, the sorts of things that you would have raised in your campaign?

HAHN: They weren't having any problems, and they were willing to leave it just like it was. They were getting by. It could have been a lot better but it wasn't better, and they were satisfied with what they had. They weren't particularly interested in having it changed.

RP: Well, what did you gather was the reason why people . . . what was your opinion as to the reason why people thought this way?

HAHN: That's a real hard thing to know why people think or what people think. I have no idea why they would think this other than they were accustomed to living this way, and I don't think they wanted to change.

RP: I thought maybe some of them might have come in the store and sort of sounded off on these things.

HAHN: Well, it's a funny thing. We didn't have too many people tell us . . . or tell me personally what they thought. But they would tell their friends. You know, well, that's the end of that. We're not going to go into his . . . and this is one of the things that happen when you run for a political office.

HAHN: Our business suffered from it.

RP: That's interesting.

HAHN: And the people . . . "Well, if he's going to take sides and he's going to vote Republican instead of Democrat and I've been voting Democrat" (I'm speaking for the individual now) "and if this is what he's going to do, well then, we don't want any part of him. We'll just take our business somewhere else. We'll just shop at Becker's where they vote Democrat" or whatever. Heh. It was just a matter of . . . eventually we could feel this in the business. I mean we noticed the traffic in the store change.

RP: Did you find that some of this business came back after . . .

HAHN: Some. Yes.

RP: . . . the election cooled off?

HAHN: Oh, yeah. Because what we were doing, we were doing a sincere job of selling in our business, and people . . . some people, all people will eventually agree to something. And I think a lot of these people agreed to that.

RP: I know you make the comment that unless something affects the people in terms of dollars and cents, they're not particularly interested. So, you find that as long as it wasn't an issue that was a pocket-book type thing, it was difficult to get people aroused.

HAHN: I think so. That's right.

RP: That was your observation?

HAHN: That's true. It wasn't anything coming out of their immediate pocket. Eventually it could have but it wasn't going to . . . they knew what they had and weren't willing to gamble on something else that might be better.

Relative to this whole thing and prior to my getting involved in a political situation, I read an excerpt from a paper that Dr. Drummond up at Indiana State had written when he was up at Northwestern /University/ working on his doctorate degree, I believe. And it was "the remarkable city of lack of growth" or some such thing. I may not be using the

HAHN: correct terminology, but it was about the lack of growth of Terre Haute. And he wrote about this community and why we were constantly fighting to grow and weren't growing. (chuckles) We were kind of shrinking down. Either the coal business, the coal strike, the railroads, our industry was moving out. I mean just about the time when things were beginning to prosper, then something would happen and we'd slide back again. But we didn't have the . . . other cities had growth and change during this period, and we weren't experiencing this. And he wrote a paper on it, and it was really quite interesting.

RP: Hm. Well.

Do you find then that . . . what did you find the response to people when they would have an industry go out on them? That's what happened from time to time in those post-war years such as Allis-Chalmers leaving or some of the others. Did that affect people that you talked with or did they speak to you much about . . .

HAHN: Disappointment primarily. The fact that they thought, well, you know, gee, this is terrible but they weren't seemingly interested enough to try to do anything about it. It was just a happening. I just think that there has been in the past . . . I think the town has been pretty much . . . or the city has been pretty much plagued by this sort of thing, by people not being interested. They'll come out in force against something but not for something. To build, to do something, they don't get behind it. And I've noticed this on a number of occasions when, oh, problems would arise. They'll come out "anti" for annexation, for . . . they'll do most anything to keep from having a change it seems. And they'll come out in force for that but they won't come out on a positive note to build something and to make it better. I don't know why that would be. I guess maybe it's not much different than most communities. I don't know.

RP: Well, I have some theories (starts to laugh) on all that, too . . .

HAHN: Yeah. (laughs)

RP: . . . that I don't want to get on the tape.

When you found that the downtown businesses were declining, was there really a great deal of concern on the part of businessmen downtown or . . . especially when the shopping centers began to open up? First, Meadows; and then Southland . . .

HAHN: There was apprehension. There was apprehension but nobody was . . . they didn't think that anything could happen, evidently, to the downtown. But, unfortunately, the people that owned the properties, the ones that should have been doing something about the mass exodus -- especially when Honey Creek Square opened, then the stores were completely depleted You know, there's Ward's, Sears, Root's now; and they're all out of there. And we had for all practical purposes the best downtown in the Middle West in this city. We had a terrific shopping area.

RP: Yeah. I can remember that when I first came here 18 years ago.

HAHN: Oh, it was wonderful. It was wonderful.

And it's gone from that to nothing now, and it's all down at Honey Creek Square.

RP: Well, did any of the businessmen try to do anything to head this off?

HAHN: Well, the only thing that I can tell you is that I tried in my small way, using the Chamber of Commerce as a vehicle, to make some changes before this happened -- to head it off. But nothing happened.

RP: What kind of changes did you try to get made?

HAHN: Well, this is when the downtown mall was being discussed.

RP: I see.

HAHN: And this is to create a shopping mall with a perimeter parking around the backs of all the stores

HAHN: and have the streets closed off, which I think could have been the salvation of the downtown. It could have been achieved, and I think it could have been accomplished. And I think it would have been a good thing.

RP: Um hm. Do you think there's any possibility that the new discussions about the mall can come to any kind of meaningful fruition?

HAHN: I'm very interested in seeing what happens. I haven't seen anything so far that looks like it's going to start to change. They projected some thoughts and some ideas relative to the downtown, and they sound interesting. And I'd like to see them happen, but so far I haven't seen anything take place.

I think the present mayor is very interested in the city of Terre Haute. And, again, I'm not a political person, and whether it be Democrat or Republican doesn't make any difference. I think the fact that he is a Democrat doesn't alter the fact that he is interested or not interested in what happens to the city. And I think this man is very interested in the city. I've known Pete . . . or Mr. Chalos now for . . . well, for as many years as I think I've been around here. And he's a real honest person, and I get along with him very well. I like him. I think he's done a good job.

RP: You never got interested in politics again after the '59 race, is that right?

HAHN: No. I was completely disillusioned.

RP: I see. So, you didn't get recruited for the Republican central committee here in the city or anything like that?

HAHN: I don't think the Republican central committee was particularly . . . it wasn't their choice to run . . . my running wasn't their choice as a candidate to begin with. And the Republican central committee kind of put up with me during this period, even though it was a good race. Had I had their complete support, I think I could have possibly accomplished more. But I didn't.

RP: So, as you would perceive it, then you could really run against a Republican man or the party's favorite when you were in the primary?

HAHN: Yeah. That's right. That's exactly right. And he was beaten very badly.

RP: So, you felt that you had given the Republican party somewhat of a message that they might not have wanted to receive, is that right?

HAHN: The first comment -- and this will probably not be met with too much enthusiasm by some people -- but the first comment that I had after the primaries were over is that we don't want another mayor like Mayor /Vern/ McMillan. McMillan was the last Republican mayor, and McMillan was a businessman. He had the McMillan athletic goods store and was a darned good mayor in my opinion. And I had anticipated being the same kind of mayor that Mayor McMillan /had been/ or at least try in some way to meet his standards. And I'd hoped that I'd have been able to achieve what he had done when he was mayor. And to meet with that kind of reception, I thought that was kind of sad.

RP: Well, did you find that really what they were hoping for was a mayor who would dispense patronage?

HAHN: They wanted a political . . . that's right. They wanted a political situation again, and I don't think that that's what we need. I don't think this is what any city needs, and I don't think we needed it at that time, particularly. We had enough politics for many years here.

RP: Well, I find Terre Haute a very political town.

HAHN: It is. Still is. (laughs)

RP: And evidently people perceive politics very much here in a way of what it will do for them in a very direct personal sense. Is that correct?

HAHN: I think so. And the fact that the city is small enough that you have a direct contact with the people that are in power, it becomes real small town. Even though it's a good-sized community, /it is/ a small-town, political-machine type of workings that we have

HAHN: here. And I'm not too sure that this thing doesn't exist elsewhere. But I'm aware of it because I live here, and I'm sure that this can be . . . you can have something better than what we have or what we've had. I think we're getting better right now.

RP: Yeah. What did the Republicans seem to indicate to you was the thing they didn't like about McMillan? Or the people who talked to you?

HAHN: He was independent, and he didn't take the political forces in stride. He would say what he thought and if he thought it was right, he would go along with it; if he didn't think so, he would say so.

RP: Well, did you find that Mayor /Leland/ Harrison was much in this vein or would you regard him as a different type of mayor?

HAHN: Oh, he was different. He was a different type of mayor, I think. I don't think that he had the capabilities that McMillan had. I think he was fundamentally an honest man. I don't think that that was any question. But I think we needed somebody that would work with other people to generate a community effort that would be constructive, that would take advice from Here we have these three colleges or universities right here in the community, and we could draw from all of this knowledge and come up with some answers. I'm sure that would be a solving of some of the problems that we have here. And I had proposed that we do something like this. Use Rose Poly, Indiana State and St. Mary-of-the-Woods and list their services so that we could work together. And get on a little better level than we'd been.

RP: One thing I was going to ask you about -- maybe this is beyond your recall -- but there was a lot of discussion that many of the Republican leaders had Ku Klux Klan ties. Were you aware of this?

HAHN: Um hm. The man that I ran against in the primaries had this very thing. At one time in his life had been exposed, and he was a part of the Ku Klux Klan ties. I think he had some ties with it.

RP: Well, did you find that by the time you came to town that they were exercising any kind of influence or trying to exercise influence, muscle, on elections?

HAHN: I don't think so. I don't think so. And I don't think that . . . if they had any ideas such as this, they were quite private, and I don't think they were very prevalent. And I don't think that they had that much influence on anybody.

RP: I see.

Do you feel that your Democratic opponents had tie-ins with some of these vice operations in town?

HAHN: You hear a lot of things when you're in politics particularly. And you hear a lot of rumors and whether you can pin them down or show evidence that they have these ties, this is awfully hard to do.

RP: I see.

HAHN: And I would say . . . I couldn't honestly tell you. You know . . . I had some ideas but that's just the thought and . . .

RP: But these weren't sort of documents, the kinds that . . .

HAHN: No, no. And I couldn't document any items.

RP: You didn't have people come to you and say look, I know that this and this and this?

HAHN: Yeah. But you don't know for sure that they're coming to you and telling you honestly what they are saying is what they really know.

RP: I see.

HAHN: They may have no more knowledge about it than you do, but they think strongly enough that they begin to believe it. And sometimes that's not true. Sometimes it's true and sometimes it isn't.

RP: Oh. I noticed also reading in the article that you had organized . . . or at least you were part of a group called United Terre Haute that was sparked by the Jaycees in about 1954 or something but didn't seem to have much of a lifespan.

HAHN: No. It kind of flared and then died. And I was

HAHN: kind of grasping at straws. I was willing to get connected with anybody that would be, you know, for the growth of Terre Haute. And I was kind of "gung ho community" for too many years really. I took a lot of time away from my family which I shouldn't have. And I think that some of it was worthwhile and some of it was just a wheel-spinning activity, and that's about as much as I can say for it.

RP: Well, why did this organization not seem to go anywhere?

HAHN: That's hard for me to tell you that. I don't know.

RP: It just didn't seem to go.

HAHN: That's right. That's right.

RP: Did you find that other community leaders would tend to resent you because you weren't a native Terre Hautean? I see a great deal of emphasis laid upon a people have got to be a native.

HAHN: Yeah. That could be. And at that time it might have . . . I didn't feel any resentment toward my not being a native. I seemed to be able to talk to the people from Terre Haute or elsewhere just about equally as well.

RP: I see. That's one of the things I was curious about as to whether there was any kind of a cleavage in the business community between people who had been around for generations and those who arrived new on the scene, such as you. You would have come in as a young man here.

HAHN. Well, in my business I think I was accepted, you know, reasonably well. I think anybody going into business you have to be in business a little while before you begin to appreciate any business. And it took us about three years, say, to get started and get our feet on the ground. But I think that by and large our acceptance here was very good. I don't see . . . you know, the fact that we were from out of town didn't make that much difference really.

END OF SIDE 1

TAPE 1-SIDE 2

RP: This non-growth phenomenon in Terre Haute . . .

HAHN: You know if you stop to think about it, look how many years this town has been here, and we've gotten up to 80 some thousand people at one time. And then it began to shut down. It began to . . . after the days of liberal prostitutions and racetracks and gambling and all that kind of stuff, when this began to shut down, then the town began to dry up just a little bit.

I think . . . what is it? Sixty-two or sixty-five thousand people population? I'm not real sure what the . . .

RP: Yeah. It depends on whose figures you're taking.

HAHN: Yeah. Right.

RP: Actually, you figure the county around us . . .

HAHN: Oh, well, now the county . . .

RP: . . . the thing really hasn't changed negatively. People who moved out into the county.

HAHN: Yeah. That could very well be although there is a decline in population rather than a growth.

RP: Yeah.

HAHN: And most other larger . . . well, Hammond. Hammond and Terre Haute were about the same size when we came down here in 1939. And Hammond is, no, 100 and some thousand or whatever it is now. But we've just never gotten up there.

RP: Well, when you were on the Chamber of Commerce, did you find that these sorts of things concerned businesses that you might have contacted about coming into town? I would assume you would have had a chance to talk to prospective firms that were going to be locating here.

HAHN: The biggest point of apprehension about coming into Terre Haute was labor. Now, rightfully or wrongfully, whether it has overcome its labor problems or not, but the sit-down strike . . . they had the first sit-down strike in the history of the nation here at the Columbian Enamelling plant.

RP: That was the general strike in '35.

HAHN: The general . . . and then they closed down the whole town! And that left a bad taste and unfortunately this stigma has still stayed with us.

RP: Did any of the business firms that you interviewed raise questions about vice in the community? Did it bother any of them? The rumored vice, I should say.

HAHN: No. It didn't seem to be a big issue. Those people that we talked to didn't seem to question that so much as they did the labor problem.

RP: I see.

HAHN: We touched on the Jaycees a little bit ago and about what they were doing and what they started to do and tried to do. My son was . . . well, both my boys were president of the local Jaycees when they were of age. Dick was the second boy, and he was the second president of the Jaycee group here. And he was the one that instituted this "Pride City" thought.

RP: Oh, I see.

HAHN: And that was his baby. And he was trying to push for a park-like setting along the river front. They put in some park benches and some ovens and things down there and tried to beautify the riverfront. It was part of his project. But in spite of their effort and in spite of all of the publicity they got relative to making it a prettier place and a nicer place -- the riverfront -- the whole thing just kind of faded. Died down again. And it died in politics again. There wasn't anything coming back from that. This was a one-way track, I think.

RP: Well, how did you find a shopping center like Meadows out here was doing as a business center? Was it really prospering back in the '60s?

HAHN: Yes. It definitely was. Up until the time Honey Creek Square came into being, our Meadows Shopping Center and I'm sure the Northland /Plaza North/ shopping center and the small center down at Southland, I think they were doing reasonably well. Our center was doing very well. I can speak for ours because it's first-hand.

RP: Uh-huh. But the formation of Honey Creek Square, I gather, threatened the . . . or at least tended to erode the economic base of the regional centers in town as well as the downtown.

HAHN: Yeah. The larger stores are there. The greater selection of shopping facilities are there. They have parking facilities obviously. We have parking facilities, but we don't have the variety of shops to select from. We still have a nucleus of good business out here, but it relegated this to a neighborhood shopping center rather than an area shopping center. Now, there's a regional shopping center over at Honey Creek Square. It takes the place of downtown. We're catering to people from the Wabash Valley, from Illinois. They come in on I-70 from everywhere.

RP: Right.

Well, I think I've pretty well covered some of the things that I would want to have discussed. I don't know if I didn't raise anything that you thought would be worthy of . . .

HAHN: I'm not too sure what you thought was worthy. (laughs) And I've done some rambling I know and I hope sincerely that . . .

RP: Well, that's the way these work.

HAHN: Yeah. And I hope sincerely some good will come from all of this.

/Here the tape was shut off. Then at this point, Mrs. Hahn entered the room. She had not been present during the conversation before./

RP: I'd like to raise that question that we were just talking about the role of the Jaycees in the park. Do you say that there was any kind of opposition in the city from that?

HAHN: Well, first of all, they frowned on it. And, well, here . . . the local police were coming through there just on their normal patrolling.

RP: Now, this would be along the Wabash?

HAHN: Along the Wabash River, and these boys were here working, putting in pilings and putting in parking areas and putting chains through there so that they could have some parking and doing it all themselves and working like demons. And the guys . . . the police were coming through and laughing at them. They'd say well, you know, why are you going to all this trouble; it's not going to make it any better. And he says all you're doing is creating trouble. He says what you're going to do is to get a lot more people down here, and he says they're going to tear it up, and he said it's not going to be any good. I couldn't believe that they took such a negative attitude with something that was actually looking pretty nice.

RP: About what time . . .

HAHN: It was a big improvement.

RP: . . . about what time was this being done? Do you remember?

HAHN: (in an aside) Do you remember the year Dick was president?

RP: This would have been when you were president of the Jaycees?

HAHN: No, no. I wasn't president of the Jaycees. I was president of the Chamber.

RP: Yeah. That's what I thought.

HAHN: But Dick -- my son Dick, Richard -- was a president of the Jaycees. The fact is he ran for national president of the Jaycees.

RP: So, it would have been the year that Dick was president?

HAHN: That's right.

RP: Well, that could be easily checked out.

MRS. H: And the reason that this came about, really . . . at that time Dick was teaching at Rose Poly. And he was to take all the dignitaries that would come to town, you know, around and escort them. And he was always ashamed because so very many people wanted to see

MRS. H: the Wabash River, and he was always ashamed of the way it looked. And all of the . . .

RP: It's sort of this myth of the Wabash . . .

HAHN: Yeah. The beautiful Wabash.

RP: . . . that was generated by the Paul Dresser song . . .

HAHN: (in unison with Mrs.H.) That's right.

RP: . . . and the "Back Home Again in Indiana" piece that . . .

HAHN: That's right. And when he'd take them down to show them this . . . you know, the cesspool down there (laughs) it was kind of a sad thing. But they did make it look better, and they did clean it all up. They got the thing so that they were . . . like that little fountain that was out there in the middle, they did a lot of landscaping in there and cleaned that all out.

RP: Was this on the west side of the river you're talking about?

HAHN: No, no, no. On the east side of the river. On this side.

RP: There was some kind of a development on the west side.

HAHN: Oooh. Well, if you want to call it a development (laughs), that was awful. Yeah. That was over in West Terre Haute. No, that was really sad over there.

RP: That was when I first came to town. You drove through that.

HAHN: Fact is you wouldn't want to go through there on foot ever. You might not come back. That was really kind of bad. /There were/ dirt floors in those houses. It was a real . . . those were real hovels.

RP: Over in West Terre Haute.

HAHN: That was sad. Yeah. It's cleaned up considerably now. It's better.

RP: Was it just that the level of poverty over there was so high that . . .

HAHN: It was . . . and this is where all the squatters would go. You know, no place else to go and they'd land in there. It was just a catch-all, I guess, for the flotsam and jetsam.

RP: Well, I find it curious that the police would have discouraged the efforts. Was this coming just from the rank and file?

HAHN: I think so. People in the patrol cars, yeah. He said that they were just going to cause them a lot more headaches because they're going to have more people to watch over there; because they were going to have more activity down there, obviously. But they were most discouraging about the whole thing.

RP: Well, how did these same policemen seem to think about local taverns and houses of ill repute?

HAHN: You don't get too much comment from them, you know, on that kind of a thing. At least, I never did.

MRS. H: That was always hush-hush.

HAHN: Yeah. That was just a private conversation.
(laughs)

RP: Did any of the owners of these places ever take out Chamber of Commerce membership?

HAHN: You mean like the tavern owners and that sort of thing?

RP: Yeah.

HAHN: I'll tell you. Let me just, as an aside, we had a blitz membership day for the Chamber of Commerce here. We raised, I don't know, I think 150 new members. Jack King was the chairman of this committee; did a terrific job. And at that time we were carrying a line of shoes -- British Walker shoes which is a real good line of shoes. And I offered as a prize, first prize, to anybody that would get the mayor's membership into the Chamber of Commerce, a free pair

HAHN: of shoes, British Walker shoes. And I want you to know, that we could get all those members -- 150 some odd people -- to join the Chamber. Nobody was able to get the mayor to join the Chamber of Commerce. And ironically enough, here he /Ralph Tucker/ is heading the Chamber of Commerce after he gets out of office!

RP: Huh. That is an irony. Did the mayor give any reasons as to why he would not join?

HAHN: No. He just didn't want to have any part of it. It was the Chamber of Commerce and that was it. We were country club as far as he was concerned.

RP: Did he see it as sort of the province of the town's Republican establishment or . . .

HAHN: He saw enemies. He didn't want to be a part of . . . he didn't want to join the enemy. The Chamber of Commerce in his eye was, you know, we were enemies. Now, I was on the traffic committee of the Chamber of Commerce, and we were critical of the traffic situation in town because we didn't have any one-way streets. We didn't have . . . the traffic lights we had were horizontal lights. You know, blue, red and green across this way. And we had . . . it was really an antiquated set-up and we were critical of this. So I ended up . . . I was chairman of that committee in the Chamber of Commerce at that time. I ended up as the mayor's traffic . . . chairman of the mayor's traffic committee. Now, he just appointed a committee and Roy White and . . . oh, I can't think of other people right now that were, you know, offhand, that were members of this committee. And we met and we worked and we were instrumental in getting all of these one-way streets that are prevalent now, downtown, under this . . . into being. They didn't have any one-way streets. We got traffic lights that are vertical now instead of horizontal, and we got all new traffic lights down there. We got the State in here. We actually did some work. And the mayor took the credit, you know. This is what he did. But you see to get the cat off of his back -- because we were being critical of the mayor and his handling of traffic -- he assigned, you know, somebody from the Chamber as chairman of the traffic committee, and we got the job done.

RP: So, he converted the Chamber's traffic committee into the mayor's traffic committee?

HAHN: That's right! That's just about in essence what happened. Right.

RP: Then he claimed responsibility for . . .

HAHN: No, not responsibility. He didn't . . .

RP: I mean for whatever achievement . . .

HAHN: That's right. (laughs) Credit.

RP: Credit, that's what I mean.

HAHN: That's right. Uh-huh.

But this is kind of . . . the Chamber had not only to sell business and to sell, you know, industry to come in here, but we also had to try to sell ourselves to the political situation that we had downtown, which was real sad. This is unfortunate.

MRS. H: Well, and too, it's just like . . . well, when you ran for mayor. He brought that up all the time as you didn't want anybody that was president of the Chamber to be mayor. This was always against Ray because he had been president of the Chamber.

RP: So, you would say then that being seen as president of the Chamber of Commerce was sort of almost a stigma?

HAHN: That's right. Well, it carried a country club stigma. And for some reason, people don't like the country club. It's a beautiful facility. It's a nice place.

MRS. H: We never belonged to it.

HAHN: We never belonged to it, but I was always associated with it.

RP: Maybe everybody thought you did.

HAHN: That's right. I was associated with it, see.

RP: Well, it sounds like the mayor was using sort of a populist appeal.

- HAHN: Oh, no doubt about it! He was extremely a good politician from this aspect. He knew how to get votes. He knew where to go and who to see and how to do it. And he was a dyed-in-the-wool politician. He knew it.
- RP: So you could see in him then, how you perceive it, creating sort of a myth of a country club establishment or a country club clique that we're all fighting against. That seemed to be part . . .
- HAHN: Well, you see the Chamber was made up of business people, obviously. And the business people were the people that obviously went to the country club in many instances -- not all of them, but many of them did. And this kind of association wasn't too hard for him to sell, even if it wasn't true. (laughs)
- RP: Did the Chamber get concerned at all about the infamous red light district in Terre Haute? Was the Chamber trying to deal with this problem? It's the one that we always hear about.
- HAHN: No. The Navy came in . . . they had a school up at Indiana State. I think it was a signal school. It was communications. Dr. [Clarence M.] Morgan was at the head of that group of people teaching up there at that time. And the government came in -- the federal government -- came in because of the close proximity to the school and all of this red light district around there. They were instrumental in closing that up. They cleaned it up. And since that time, it hasn't come back.
- RP: So, what came back after the war would only be sort of little scattered operations?
- HAHN: Yeah. That's right. It wasn't . . . no more . . . it wasn't as meaningful as it was before the war. (chuckles) But during the war period they closed all those things down because they had all these kids up there and they didn't want that kind of activity that close.
- RP: I see.

[Tape stopped for a while.]

RP: Now, you say you were on the school board at the time of reorganization?

HAHN: Yes.

Was that when they brought in all the county schools?

HAHN: Yes, sir. And [I] served on the first interim board. It was an appointed board rather than an elected board to serve in an interim period until they had an election. And I served on that interim board. I was appointed by the judge -- Criss. Judge [Herbert R.] Criss, I think, made the appointment.

MRS: H: Then weren't you president . . . weren't you elected then after that to be president?

HAHN: Not on that one. On the city school board. I was elected to the city school board.

RP: You were elected when you just had the Terre Haute city school board?

HAHN: Yes. I was elected to that. I served eight years on that board and one year as president . . . or maybe two years as president, I'm not too sure. But I served two terms -- one as appointed and another one, elected.

RP: That's when they were running three high schools in the city then and a raft of others.

HAHN: That's right.

RP: But then they would have had all the township schools around.

HAHN: Well, the township schools were the ones that we inherited then, when they had a reorganization. Um hm.

RP: And you were still on the board at the time of the reorganization or . . .

HAHN: Well . . .

RP: . . . did they appoint some kind of a continuation board or what?

HAHN: They appointed a board to serve after they had achieved reorganization, but I was on the local board when we were still having meetings over in Indianapolis relative to what will the responsibilities be of the total board and of the county board at that time then -- you know, the reorganized school district. And so we had . . . you know, did a lot of preparation prior to the actual achievement of the reorganization.

RP: Well, did you find yourself being hassled a lot by people who were resentful of what was going on?

HAHN: There was . . . well, I think anytime you become involved in a group that's running something and you start to do something -- whether it's remodeling a school or whether it's reorganizing or whatever -- you get hassled by the people. And we got our fair share of hassling.

RP: Well, I find . . . school reorganization strikes me as an interesting phenomenon of a rather significant change in a town that doesn't want to change. And I was wondering what kind of reaction you found from the townspeople around to this rather far-reaching change.

HAHN: I think that probably a man like Herb Lamb, who actually went into the county and visited these township schools and was talking to these people, could probably answer this. I didn't go to those reorganization meetings there as he did, but they . . . you know they were offering a heck of a lot better school system than they had had. Because we had had the township trustees running the schools, and they knew nothing about schooling -- knew nothing about education. And in many instances it was just a political reward system in the county schools. And some of the schools were good schools and some of them were real poor schools. But when we were able to get them all in an organized group, then we had something to sell and I think had a much better school system because of it, because then it was uniform. There was uniform education throughout the county.

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